United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/33

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 December 2018

Original: English

**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Sixty-third session**
11–22 March 2019
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"**

## Statement submitted by ISIS — Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-19649 (E) 061218

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## Statement

# Trauma Relief as a Prerequisite for Enhanced Effectiveness of Social Protection Schemes for Women and Girls in Post-Conflict Contexts

The value of robust and crisis-responsive social protection systems is especially evident in post-conflict contexts where the impact of war or large-scale armed violence often places communities, households and individuals, particularly women, at risk of chronic vulnerability. Post-conflict reconstruction programmes often prioritise the rebuilding of critical physical infrastructure and the provision of basic services at the expense of a focus on 'soft' initiatives that strengthen resilience such as psychosocial support whose contribution to individual and collective ability to withstand shocks and recover from crisis is less visible.

However, for women and girls, for whom gender-based violations in conflict and especially conflict-related sexual violence have a unique psychological and physical impact, it is clear that without trauma relief, efforts for their empowerment — including targeted social protection schemes — are incomplete and less effective. Therefore, incorporating trauma relief must be a universal basic guarantee for social protection systems in post-conflict countries, if women and girls are to experience higher income, capacity and empowerment.

Several international instruments exist, offering a framework for developing and implementing social protection systems from a gender-responsive rights-based approach including important principles. For instance, a key element of the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention 1952 (No.102) that provided the model for other key conventions and recommendations, the key principle of "the participation of the persons protected in the management of social security schemes" is included as a prerequisite for achieving the minimum objectives of any social protection system. Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No 202) focused on guiding the nationally defined basic guarantees for social protection aimed at alleviating or preventing poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion by highlighting principles such as "gender equality and responsiveness to special needs."

While women in conflict-affected contexts have benefited from the principles of inclusivity, state duty to respond to special needs and to advance gender equality, when advocating for social protection schemes or post-conflict recovery programming that includes and benefits them, it has also become apparent that aside from seeking inclusion and accountability, a focus on strengthening women and girls' resilience through trauma relief must be incorporated for their empowerment especially in sight of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

Having realised this following years of work in conflict-affected Liberia, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe, ISIS — Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange sought to generate an evidence base on the value of incorporating trauma relief in social protection schemes, by partnering with Tilburg University, Makerere University and Mbarara University to conduct research on The Cost-Benefit of Cash-Transfer Programmes and Post-Trauma Services for Economic Empowerment of Women in Uganda. The research studied the impact of government social protection programmes and trauma counselling on social economic resilience among elderly and young women in highly traumatised communities in Northern Uganda. This focused on income, social inclusion, perceived financial, information and social capabilities, systems (including access to legal, financial and medical services), experiencing less worry and lastly empowerment (a change in agency and behaviour).

The study found that the effect of support for trauma relief had an independent and higher effect on income and social-economic resilience than the social protection programmes did. It was also found that combined effect on economic resilience was highest when women received social protection support (in this case cash transfers) as well as trauma relief support (in this case counselling and self-help low-cost post-traumatic stress programme). The conclusion is therefore that trauma relief is cost-beneficial and should be addressed as a high priority in post-conflict recovery along with any social protection schemes.